The main disadvantage of using arithmetical operators is that you cannot directly use a range of cells. In other words, to enter the equivalent of `=SUM(A1:A3)`, you would need to type `=A1+A2+A3`.

Otherwise, whether you use a function or an operator is largely up to you—except, of course, when you are subtracting. However, if you use spreadsheets regularly in a group setting such as a class or an office, you might want to standardize on an entry format so that everyone who handles a spreadsheet becomes accustomed to a standard input.

Simple statistics

Another common use for spreadsheet functions is to pull useful information out of a list, such as a series of test scores in a class, or a summary of earnings per quarter for a company.

You can, of course, scan a list of figures if you want basic information such as the highest or lowest entry or the average. The only trouble is, the longer the list, the more time you waste and the more likely you are to miss what you are looking for. Instead, it is usually quicker and more efficient to enter a function. Such reasons explain the existence of a function like COUNT, which does no more than give the total number of entries in the designated cell range.

Similarly, to find the highest or lowest entry, you can use MIN or MAX. For each of these formulas, all arguments are either a range of cells, or a series of cells entered individually.

Each also has a related function, MINA or MAXA, which performs the same function, but also treats a cell formatted for text as having a value of 0. (The same treatment of text occurs in any variation of another function that adds an "A" to the end.) Either function gives the same result, and could be useful if you used a text notation to indicate, for example, if any students were absent when a test was written, and you wanted to check whether to schedule a makeup exam.

For more flexibility in similar operations, you could use LARGE or SMALL, both of which add a specialized argument of rank. If the rank is 1 used with LARGE, you get the same result as you would with MAX. However, if the rank is 2, then the result is the second largest result. Similarly, a rank of 2 used with SMALL gives you the second smallest number. Both LARGE and SMALL are handy as a permanent control, since, by changing the rank argument, you can quickly scan multiple results.

You would need to be an expert to want to find the Poisson distribution of a sample, or to find the skew or negative binomial of a distribution (and, if you are, you will find functions in Calc for such things). However, for the rest of us, there are simpler statistical functions that you can quickly learn to use.

In particular, if you need an average, you have a number of functions to choose from. You can find the arithmetical mean—that is, the result when you add all entries in a list then divided by the number of entries, by entering a range of numbers when using AVERAGE, or AVERAGEA to include text entries and to give them a value of zero.

In addition, you can get other information about the data set:

- MEDIAN: Logically ranks the numbers (lowest to highest) to evaluate the median value. In a set containing an uneven number of values, the median will be the number in the middle of the ranked list. In a set containing an even number of values, the median will be the mean of the two values in the middle of the ranked list.

- MODE: The most common entry in a list of numbers.

- QUARTILE: The entry at a set position in the array of numbers. Besides the cell range, you enter the type of quartile: 0 for the lowest entry, 1 for the value of 25%, 2 for the value of 50%, 3 for 75%, and 4 for the highest entry. Note that the result for types 1 through 3 may not represent an actual item entered.

- RANK: The position of a given entry in the entire list, measured either from top to bottom or bottom to top. You need to enter the cell address for the entry, the range of entries,